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IN THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently Amended) An exhaust system component, comprising:
a shell; and
an endcone assembly comprising a conical shaped sidewall extending outwardly from an inlet end of said endcone assembly to a shoulder of said endcone assembly at an outlet end of said endcone assembly, wherein said endcone assembly is attached to said shell at said shoulder; and a mat protection element extending from said shoulder, away from said sidewall, wherein said mat protection element comprises a protrusion extending outwardly from said mat protection element contacting said shell;
~~wherein said shoulder secures to an exhaust system component.~~
2. (Currently Amended) The exhaust system component of Claim 1, wherein a shoulder diameter is greater than or equal to a mat protection element diameter.
3. (Cancelled)
4. (Original) The exhaust system component of Claim 1, wherein said mat protection element has a conical geometry extending inward from said shoulder.
5. (Original) The exhaust system component of Claim 1, wherein said mat protection element has a conical geometry extending outward from said shoulder.
6. (Original) The exhaust system component of Claim 1, wherein said mat protection element has a cylindrical geometry.
7. (Cancelled)
8. (Currently Amended) The exhaust system component of Claim ~~1~~7, wherein said protrusion is selected from the group consisting of a rib, a dimple, and combinations comprising at least one of the foregoing protrusions.

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9. (Currently Amended) The exhaust system component of Claim 17, wherein said protrusion is longitudinally disposed on said mat protection element.

10. (Currently Amended) A catalytic converter, comprising:
a catalyst substrate comprising a catalyst;
a shell concentrically disposed around said catalyst substrate;
a mat support material disposed between said catalyst substrate and said shell,
and concentrically around said catalyst substrate; and
an endcone assembly comprising a conical shaped sidewall extending outwardly from an inlet end of said endcone assembly to a shoulder of said endcone assembly at an outlet end of said endcone assembly, wherein said endcone assembly is attached to said shell at said shoulder and a mat protection element extending from said shoulder, away from said sidewall, wherein said mat protection element comprises a first protrusion extending outwardly from said mat protection element contacting said shell, ~~wherein said endcone assembly is securedly attached to said shell at said shoulder.~~

11. (Currently Amended) The catalytic converter of Claim 10, wherein an end of said mat protection element contacts ~~at least an edge of~~ said mat support material.

12. (Currently Amended) The catalytic converter of Claim 10, wherein ~~at least a portion of~~ said mat protection element penetrates ~~at least a portion of~~ said mat support material.

13. (Currently Amended) The catalytic converter of Claim 10, wherein said mat protection element further comprises a second protrusion ~~at least two protrusions~~ extending outwardly from said mat protection element contacting said shell ~~to said~~.

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14. (Currently Amended) The catalytic converter of Claim 13, wherein said first protrusion and second protrusion are each is-selected from the group consisting of a rib, a dimple, and combinations comprising at least one of the foregoing protrusions.

15. (Currently Amended) A method for manufacturing a catalytic converter, comprising:
concentrically disposing a catalyst substrate in a shell;
disposing concentrically a mat support material between said catalyst substrate and said shell, and around said catalyst substrate;
securing a shoulder of an endcone assembly to said shell, wherein said endcone assembly comprises a conical shaped sidewall extending outwardly from an inlet end of said endcone assembly to said a-shoulder of said endcone assembly at an outlet end of said endcone assembly, and a mat protection element extending from said shoulder, away from said sidewall; and
contacting said shell with a first protrusion extending outwardly from said mat protection element.

16. (Original) The method of Claim 15, further comprising disposing concentrically said mat protection element within said shell, and between said catalyst substrate and said shell.

17. (Currently Amended) The method of Claim 15, further comprising contacting engaging said shell with a second protrusion at least two protrusions extending outwardly from said mat protection element.

18. (Currently Amended) The method of Claim 17, wherein said first protrusion and second protrusion are each is selected from the group consisting of a rib, a dimple, and combinations comprising at least one of the foregoing protrusions.

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19. (Currently Amended) The method of Claim 15, further comprising contacting ~~at least a~~ leading edge of said mat support material with said mat protection element.

20. (Currently Amended) The method of Claim 19, further comprises penetrating ~~at least a~~ portion of said mat support material with at least a portion of said mat protection element.

21. (New) An exhaust system component, comprising:
a substrate;
a shell concentrically disposed around said substrate;
a mat support material disposed between said substrate and said shell; and
an endcone assembly comprising a conical shaped sidewall extending outwardly from an inlet end of said endcone assembly to a shoulder of said endcone assembly at an outlet end of said endcone assembly, wherein said endcone assembly is attached to said shell at said shoulder; and a mat protection element extending from said shoulder, away from said sidewall, wherein said mat protection element comprises a first portion mat protection side wall and a second portion mat protection side wall, wherein said first portion mat protection side wall is concentrically disposed inwardly from and in contact with said shoulder, and wherein said second portion mat protection side wall comprises a straight edged comprising a first end in contact with said first portion mat protection side wall and a second end in contact with an edge of said mat support material.

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22. (New) An exhaust system component, comprising:
a substrate;
a shell concentrically disposed around said substrate;
a mat support material disposed between said substrate and said shell; and
an endcone assembly comprising a conical shaped sidewall extending
outwardly from an inlet end of said endcone assembly to a shoulder of said endcone assembly
at an outlet end of said endcone assembly, wherein said endcone assembly is attached to said
shell at said shoulder; and a mat protection element extending from said shoulder, away from
said sidewall, wherein said mat protection element comprises a first portion mat protection
side wall, a second portion mat protection side wall, a third portion mat protection side wall,
and a fourth portion mat protection side wall, wherein said first mat protection side wall is
concentrically inwardly disposed from said shoulder and comprises a first portion conical
shape, wherein said second portion mat protection side wall comprises a straight edged
comprising a first end in contact with said first portion mat protection side wall and a second
end in contact with said third portion mat protection side wall, wherein said third portion mat
protection side wall is concentrically inwardly disposed from said second end of said second
portion mat protection side wall and comprises a third portion conical shape, and wherein said
fourth mat protection side wall is in contact with said third portion mat protection side wall
and is in contact with a portion of said mat support material.